

## REGION

# Dixon becomes Baltimore's first female mayor

BALTIMORE (AP) — Sheila Dixon officially became Baltimore's first female mayor yesterday, facing challenges with violent crime, trying to emerge from the cloud of an ethics investigation and fending off a crowded field of opponents planning to run against her.

Under the city's charter, Ms. Dixon automatically steps into the job to finish Gov. Martin O'Malley's remaining mayoral term, which ends in December.

The Baltimore native has held public office in the city since 1987, when she was elected to the City Council. She went on to become the first black woman to become City Council president, winning two citywide

elections in 1999 and 2004. In that role, she has chaired the city's five-member Board of Estimates, which oversees all major city contracts. Ms. Dixon plans to run for a full four-year term as mayor.

Ms. Dixon, 53, is a black Democrat in a city with a population that is 65 percent black and 90 percent Democratic. Her inauguration today marks a milestone for the former elementary school teacher with a



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bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a master's degree in educational management.

Her long roots in city politics and the power of incumbency make her a front-runner for a full term, said Matthew Crenson, a Johns Hopkins University political scientist.

"She's got name recognition," Mr. Crenson said. "She has had the opportunity to form lots of alliances, and I think they will probably serve her well."

At the same time, Ms. Dixon will be in a highly visible office with a growing number of opponents waiting to pounce on mistakes. Opponents who already have announced they are run-

ning include City Councilman Keiffer Mitchell Jr., Delegate Jill Carter, high school principal Andrey Bundley and Circuit Court Clerk Frank Conaway Sr. Baltimore Comptroller Joan M. Pratt also has expressed interest in the race.

"She has to be extremely careful not to commit any gaffes," Mr. Crenson said of Ms. Dixon.

During a 1991 debate at City Hall on redistricting, Ms. Dixon caused a major stir when she took off one of her shoes, held it up and told white city council members: "Now the shoe is on the other foot."

More recently, Ms. Dixon has been dogged for months by a state investigation relating

to her involvement with city money that went to companies employing her sister and her former campaign chairman. Although the city ethics board cleared Ms. Dixon of ethics violations last week, state investigators are not commenting on the status of their probe, which netted an indictment last month.

Ms. Dixon hasn't yet outlined detailed plans for her administration. She has said she wants to focus on strengthening neighborhoods by making the city cleaner and stepping up cooperation between the city's law enforcement agencies.

At a news conference last week, she summed up her over-

all goals this way: "Cleaner, greener, effective, efficient transparent government, working in partnership with the community, enhancing many of the initiatives that we've been working on."

Ms. Dixon spoke briefly of her plans at the news conference where she announced two cabinet appointments. The mother of two described herself as "a hands-on person" when it comes to politics.

"I'm driven by finding a solution to the problem and not accepting excuses," she said. "I apply this philosophy to myself. I apply this philosophy to my children, and I apply this philosophy to my staff."